

Civil Air Patrol cadet honored as the state's best

Written by Lt Col Gene Sullivan
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For a student who sets and meets such high standards for himself, it only seems fitting that 17-year-old Mark Todd receive top honors from an organization affiliated with the aviation and aerospace industries.

After making his mark on land and sea, all that was left was air.

Todd, a member of the Low Country Composite Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol, was selected by the Air Force Association as Outstanding Cadet of the Year for South Carolina. The cadet captain, who was chosen out of 500 cadets statewide for his leadership and service, was presented the award by state Rep. Richard Chalk on May 29.

"Mark is a well-rounded and motivated individual. A hardworking leader that is very deserving of this award," said Gene Sullivan, commander of the Low Country Composite Squadron.

The organization is an auxiliary member of the Air Force, and its mission is to provide aerospace education, cadet programs and emergency services. Cadet training is designed to motivate young men and women in the ideals of leadership and service through military-style training, discipline and education. Through orientation flights with experienced Civil Air Patrol volunteer pilots, cadets learn about navigation and aircraft instrumentation. According to the national organization, cadets can fly approximately 16,000 hours in powered aircraft each year. Todd's cadet group meets every Thursday at the Hilton Head Island Airport.

"It's basically meant to teach kids to be better citizens by learning how to listen to others and interact with people. At first, it wasn't something I thought I'd be interested in, but when I went to the summer camp I got hooked," Todd said. "I realized the opportunities it would offer in the way of friendship. I like working with different people, and all of these different programs help me get that interaction."

During his time with the Civil Air Patrol, Todd has participated in a variety of regional and national activities related to the organization, including Hawk Mountain Ranger School. Located in Kempton, Pa., the summer school provides wilderness search and rescue training to cadets and seniors throughout the country.

"It was an intense 10 days," he said. "We had a lot of cold soup, but it was a lot of fun."

Last summer, Todd also got the opportunity to flight marshal at the largest air show in the world, AirVenture, in Oshkosh, Wis. He plans to apply for a scholarship through the Civil Air Patrol that will enable him to pursue getting a private pilot's license, but in the meantime he's working on obtaining a Coast Guard captain's license. Todd works as a mate on several of the island's charter boats.

"It might not seem like I have a lot of time, but I just choose what I really want to do and what I'll get the most from," he said. "None of the activities really conflict. It's all fun, and I wouldn't do one over any of the others."

Outside of his involvement with the Civil Air Patrol, Todd is a rising senior at Hilton Head Island High School, where he maintains a 4.1 GPA and serves as the executive officer of the Navy JROTC unit. He also was a varsity swimmer for four years and a member of the varsity crew team. This summer, he's in the process of completing requirements for the rank of Eagle Scout with Boy Scouts of America and applying to colleges.

Todd said time spent with the Civil Air Patrol and Boy Scouts of America has broadened his horizons with respect to the opportunities that are available to him career-wise. After obtaining

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a degree in computer science at college, he hopes to work for the Central Intelligence Agency.

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